

PSC FILES EMERGENCY SLAMMING RULE WITH SECRETARY OF STATE

Jefferson City (October 26, 1998)---In an effort to alleviate problems associated with customers being switched from one long distance or basic local telecommunications carrier to another without the customer's knowledge, the Missouri Public Service Commission has filed a proposed anti-slamming emergency rule with the Missouri Secretary of State. The emergency rule, which will go into effect on January 1, 1999, outlines procedures telecommunications carriers must go through **before** a customer is switched from one carrier to another.

Switching a customer from one carrier to another without the customer's knowledge is known as "slamming". Missouri received at least 840 "slamming" complaints during 1998.

"Too often Missouri customers do not know that they have been switched until after they have received their phone bill," stated Missouri Public Service Commission Chair Sheila Lumpe. "The number of complaints received from customers that have been slammed is not acceptable. This emergency rule will place requirements on telecommunications providers to ensure that customers know that they are being asked to switch from one carrier to another."

The emergency rule requires telecommunications companies to use certain procedures to verify that a customer has authorized a change in telecommunications providers. Currently, Missouri citizens are being subjected to unauthorized changes of telecommunications providers at extremely high rates.

Under the emergency rule, no telecommunications provider can submit an order to change a customer's long distance or basic local telecommunications service provider unless the order has been confirmed through one of the following procedures:

1. An independent third party verification of the customer's desire to switch. That third party must be in a location physically separate from the telemarketing representative and customer verification must be in a recorded form; or

(More)

2. The telecommunications provider receives authorization from the customer in an electronic format; or

3. The telecommunications provider has received a postcard from the customer authorizing the switch from one carrier to another; or

4. The telecommunications provider has obtained the customer's written authorization to change carriers.

Under the emergency rule, each of the above options carries with it specific procedures telecommunications carriers must adhere to.

In addition, the emergency rule states that if a customer is changed to a telecommunications company without the customer's knowledge or consent, the customer will not be required to pay any charges above the rate the customer's presubscribed telecommunications company would have charged for the same calls.

The 89th General Assembly passed House Bill 1506 which directed the Missouri Public Service Commission to adopt "slamming" rules to address this problem.